

Pruning Spring-Flowering Shrubs

Spring is a great time to enjoy beautiful flowering shrubs like forsythia, Vanhoutte spirea, flowering quince, lilac and mockorange. Shrubs that flower in the spring are normally pruned immediately after flowering. Pruning during the dormant season does not harm the health of the plant, but will reduce flowering in the spring. Shrubs that bloom on current season's growth or that do not produce ornamental flowers are best pruned in late winter to early spring. Examples include Rose-of-Sharon, Bumald Spirea and Japanese Spirea.

Pruning during the spring allows wounds to heal quickly without threat from insects or disease. There is no need to treat pruning cuts with paints or sealers. In fact, some of these products may retard healing.

There are three basic methods used in pruning shrubs -- thinning, heading back and rejuvenating. Thinning is used to thin out branches from a shrub that is too dense. It is accomplished by removing most of the inward growing twigs by either cutting them back to a larger branch or cutting them back to just above an outward facing bud. On multi-stemmed shrubs, the oldest canes may be completely removed.

Heading back is removing the end of a branch by cutting it back to a bud and is used for either reducing height or keeping a shrub compact.

Rejuvenation is the most severe type of pruning and is normally done during the dormant season. It may be used on multi-stemmed shrubs that have become too large with too many old branches to justify saving the younger canes. All stems are cut back to 3- to 5-inch stubs. This works well for spirea, forsythia, pyracantha, ninebark, Russian almond, mock orange, shrub roses and flowering quince.

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